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Greenchoice and Wetlands International kick-off their partnership on Earth Day to restore Guinea-Bissau's mangroves

Dutch sustainable energy supplier Greenchoice and Wetlands International, the international NGO dedicated to protecting and restoring wetlands, launch a joint project in Guinea Bissau to restore one of the country's largest mangrove areas to its former mangrove glory, removing carbon directly from the atmosphere and making a positive contribution to the local biodiversity and community in the process.

With more than 3000 km², Guinea-Bissau has the second-largest mangrove area in Africa. But much of this has been lost as a result of felling and burning for rice cultivation. In recent years, tens of thousands of hectares of these rice fields have been deserted, as farmers switched to cashew nut production outside the mangrove zone or migrated to the city.

At the same time, scientific bodies and NGOs from across the world have warned that it is only with healthy ecosystems that we can boost biodiversity, enhance food and water security and people's livelihoods – and counteract climate change.

Wetlands International estimates that 2500 ha of restored mangroves may store up to 1,000,000 tons of CO₂ in the growing mangrove trees and soil over a timeframe of 30 years. Alongside this, the team expects that with the return of mangroves, bird diversity will increase and manatee, dolphin and otter populations will thrive. Around 1000 people will directly benefit through jobs, restoration work and biodiversity monitoring.

Catalysing climate ambition

Greenchoice supplies its customers with renewable electricity but also sells natural gas. As a bridging plan to the phasing out of natural gas, it has been compensating its customers' natural gas consumption by purchasing carbon credits from existing forest projects.

Simultaneously Greenchoice stimulates its customers to reduce their gas use.

Greenchoice recently embarked on a novel strategy to enable as much impact for climate, community and biodiversity as possible by playing a catalyst role. They will now also help initiate new projects to secure and restore an amount of carbon equivalent to the carbon footprint of all the natural gas sold to customers but without claiming this carbon impact via credits.

This means that the gas footprint of clients is no longer offset directly and a continued incentive remains in place for clients to reduce their emissions. Moreover, these voluntary projects may contribute to countries' efforts to achieve their climate targets under the Paris Agreement. Greenchoice has introduced the term 'forest compensation' instead of 'carbon offsetting' or 'carbon neutrality' for the gas it sells to emphasise positive impact for climate, community and biodiversity.

Ruben Veefkind, strategy and CO₂ projects manager at Greenchoice, said: "The urgency of the climate change and biodiversity crises means that action must start now. This involves safeguarding and restoring wetlands as well as transforming the energy sector. We aim to be a catalyst that leverages further climate action by pioneering novel solutions and sharing our knowledge and experiences."

Ecological mangrove restoration

While many mangrove restoration projects rely on mangrove planting, the Guinea-Bissau project will create the right hydrological and socio-economic conditions for mangroves to grow back naturally, using a more effective restoration method called community based Ecological Mangrove Restoration. Mangroves restored in this way survive and function better than planted mangroves.

Together, Greenchoice and Wetlands International will demonstrate best practice on the ground and support a larger group of associated partners to scale up by developing, financing and implementing landscape level restoration plans.

Ibrahima Thiam, Director of Wetlands International in Coastal West Africa, said:

"the collaboration with Greenchoice will enable us to accelerate our support for communities in Guinea-Bissau and strengthen the role they play in managing and restoring this critical ecosystem. We hope it will also serve as a leading example for governments and companies throughout West Africa".

Pieter van Eijk, Programme Head Coasts & Deltas at Wetlands International said:

"Mangroves are vital to the resilience of the planet in many ways, from taking carbon out of the atmosphere to community resilience, buffering storms, and acting as the nurseries for of the sea. But we are losing them fast. With Greenchoice, we have a fantastic opportunity to achieve impact on the ground by restoring and safeguarding wetlands for nature and people, while combatting climate change."

Note for editors

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About Greenchoice

Greenchoice is a sustainable energy supplier with more than 600,000 customers and about 470 employees. The energy company only supplies Dutch green electricity and forest-compensated gas, and also helps customers generate green electricity themselves and save energy. The goal is to accelerate the energy transition and to bring a greener world closer and closer.

About Wetlands International

Wetlands International is the global non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation and restoration of wetlands. Its vision is a world in which wetlands are cherished for their beauty, the life they support and the resources they provide. Its mission is to inspire and mobilize society to protect and restore wetlands for people and nature.